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THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM:

WHICH IS ITS CHAMPION IN AMERICA,

THE NORTH OR THE SOUTH?

BY

THOMAS [✓] HUGHES, BARRISTER,

AUTHOR OF "TOM BROWN'S SCHOOL-DAYS," &c. &c.

*(Being a Speech delivered by him at Exeter Hall on the
29th of January, 1863.)*

WITH NOTES AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

THE Executive Committee of the Emancipation Society having done me the honour of proposing to print and circulate the subjoined speech, spoken at their meeting at Exeter Hall, I cannot allow it to go forth to my countrymen generally in this new form without adding a few words. I would, in the first place, warn any reader who has not studied the American question, not to take this speech as a full statement of the case against the Confederate States. On reading it through I see the many gaps and weak places, but though it would be easy enough to fill them up now, I cannot think that it would be honest. If the speech is to be printed, let it be the speech as it was spoken, without addition or alteration. I have therefore simply taken the report in the *Morning Star* as it stood, adding in some half dozen places a word or two to make the sense clear, which words, to the best of my remembrance, were actually used at the time.

There are many sides of the question which it was impossible even to touch upon in the time allowed to a speaker. The treachery of the Southern leaders during Buchanan's presidency—the methods by which they have ruled the Union for forty years—their different readings of the Constitution at

different times, putting upon its provisions whatever meaning suited them for the particular occasion, and forcing that meaning upon the North—the deliberate insolence with which they have carried out the policy of governing (as Randolph put it), “not by our black slaves at the South, but through your white slaves of the North”—their avowed designs on Mexico, Cuba, and other possessions of neighbouring powers—the ever increasing degradation, morally and intellectually, of the whole black, and two-thirds of the white population of the Southern States—none of these matters could be touched on, and yet without touching upon them, how could a speaker do justice to a resolution, declaring that the Southern States are not entitled to the sympathy of England?

“We know what we are doing ; we have conquered you once, and we will conquer you again. Ay, sir, we will drive you to the wall, and when we have you there once more we mean to keep you there, and nail you down like bad money.” So said John Randolph the slave-owner at the time of the Missouri compromise, forty years ago, and the spirit of those words has shone through all Southern policy from that day to this. True to his creed, the slave-owner is fighting for his old empire, and the freemen of the North for their independence, and that independence can never be wrought out till slavery is put down.

This is no place to argue the matter, but that is the truth ; and no man who so believes has a right to shrink from stating his belief at such a time as the present. I can only say for myself, that for many years I have been deeply interested in American politics, and have given all the time I could spare to the study of them, and am more and more convinced every day of the truth of the views here put forth.

And now I would just ask those Englishmen who sympathize with the Southern States—who uphold their cause as the cause of freedom—whether they have ever fairly considered what is to be the end of the present civil war if that cause should triumph? I will give up all other points. I will admit for the sake of bringing the question to a simple issue, that the people of the North do not care about slavery, that they despise the negro, and ill treat him ; that they have freed the slaves in the district of Columbia, have acknowledged Liberia and Hayti, have accorded the right of search to our cruisers, hanged a slave captain, voted £20,000,000 compensation for the slaves in Missouri, and proclaimed freedom to the slaves in rebel States, simply as war measures, and to throw dust into the eyes of England. I take my stand simply on the one point, which surely no one who has looked into the matter at all will question, that the North are pledged to oppose the extension of slavery beyond its present limits, and that the South are pledged to its extension into all new territories. This they cannot deny in the face of resolution after resolution, moved in the Senate, the House of Representatives, and at convention after convention by the Southern leaders, declaring, “ that the Federal constitution guarantees slavery in the territories; ” “ that in all new territories the institution of slavery as it exists in the Southern States shall be recognised and protected by Congress.” They cannot deny it, in the face of the written and spoken words of these leaders, who have pledged themselves one and all to their newly-found corner-stone.

On the other hand, the Chicago platform (on which Mr. Lincoln was elected President, and from which he at any rate has never swerved) declares in clause 7, “ that the *new* dogma, that

the constitution, of its own force, carries slavery in any or all of the territories of the United States, is a dangerous political heresy, * * revolutionary in its tendency, and subversive of the peace and harmony of the country," and in clause 8, "that the normal condition of all the territory of the United States is that of freedom, * * and we deny the authority of Congress, of a territorial legislature, or of any individuals to give legal existence to slavery in any territory of the United States." Thus, in what may fairly be called the charters of each side, the issue of the extension of slavery into new territories is brought to the front.

Now when Englishmen sympathize with the Southern States, and wish them success in this war, do they mean that the extension of slavery over half a continent is a matter which is not worth considering? or, have they any reason for saying that the South has given up this point, and will not carry slavery into new territories if successful? No public man, no public assembly of any one of the Southern States, has ever hinted such a conclusion. They have left us in no doubt as to what they mean; "I want Cuba," said the senator for Missouri, just before secession, "Potosi, Tamanlipas, and one or two other Mexican states, and I want them all for the same reason, for the planting and spreading of slavery. Yes, I want these countries for the spread of slavery. I would spread the blessings of slavery, like the religion of our Divine Master, to the uttermost ends of the earth." "Slavery *must* expand," writes Governor Call, of Florida, in February, 1861, "with the extension of the white race, into every region congenial to its nature and possible to its labour. It cannot be confined to its present limits. Dire and uncontrollable necessity will impel

the master and the slave to cut their way through every barrier, or perish together in the attempt. The consequences of confinement are too terrible to be borne." These are plain bold statements of Southern aims, and they are not the men to go back from them. Southern success involves this at any rate, whatever else it may include.

Nothing less than this *can* come of the success of the South, and against such an ending I will protest wherever and whenever I can; as an Englishman, as a man, as a Christian.

War and bloodshed, blazing towns and villages, and starving people, are fearful sights. Every man must shrink from them, must long to see an end to them. But there are times when nations have to endure these things, when the stake at issue is so precious that the truest men and the gentlest women are the foremost to nerve their hearts to brave all miseries, to undergo all sacrifices, so that it be not lost. The present contest in America is of this kind. "Either slavery dies now for ever on the American continent, so that a slaveholder will be to the coming generations as fanciful and traditional a figure as a Red Indian in his war paint, or he will govern the continent from the Canada line to Mexico." So says one of the first living Americans, speaking the simple and obvious truth, as it seems to me. Therefore, I believe that a premature peace, brought about by the late Southern successes, and the slavery dry-rot in the Northern democratic party, would be the greatest calamity which could happen to America and the world. I call any peace premature which shall not at least secure the Mississippi boundary, and shut up slavery within the Gulf States. Nothing but physical and financial exhaustion will bring the South to these terms. The other alternative is, a break up of

the Free States, and the speedy conversion of the whole republic, except New England, into a great confederacy, ruled by a fierce and proud oligarchy, and with slavery for its cornerstone. How will England like standing in a few years face to face with such a power as this?

Such are the views which we hold as to the issues of the war in America. If they are wrong, let us hear why. We look in vain in the leading papers which advocate the cause of the South, and yet declare that they hate slavery, for any reasonable and temperate statement of what end they hope to see. We meet no one in society holding their views who will face the question fairly. It only remains for us, at the risk of any amount of abuse and misrepresentation, to force this question home to all our countrymen in the best way we can, and to prove if we can—and we firmly believe that we can do so—that the great bulk of the British nation holds with us.

S P E E C H .

Mr. THOMAS HUGHES, said: Ladies and Gentlemen,—I am very happy to be here to meet you this evening. It must be a great satisfaction to every man who believes as I do, to find that this question, as to what is the real issue in America, is coming out more clearly and distinctly everywhere. The question which in England is now coming up clearer and sharper every day is, "which is the side of freedom?" That is the only question which an Englishman has to ask himself; and that is the question which is asked now of this nation. It has been within the last fortnight answered by the *Times*. (Cheers, and groans for the *Times*.) Allow me to suggest, ladies and gentlemen, that as our time is limited, and as each speaker has only twenty minutes allowed him to say all that he has to say in, there is no time for all this applause. I shall be very much obliged to you if, at any rate while I am speaking, you will be kind enough to suppress your cheering and give me the time to say what I have to say. Again I say, ladies and gentlemen, that the issue has been fairly taken by the *Times* newspaper. I hold the article in my hand of Monday, the 19th of this month, in which the *Times* says, "The great mind of England is deeply impressed with the conviction of the truth of all this;"—I leave out some sentences which are not material—"that the cause of the South gallantly defending itself against the cruel and desolating invasions of the North is the cause of freedom." (Hisses.) Now, ladies and gentlemen, that is the point upon which we wish to take issue this evening. Let us see whether the voice of England supports that statement. (No, no.) In the same article there are some remarks to which the speaker who preceded me referred—some facetious remarks and some bitter taunts—calling us who are here present to address you this evening

a set of struggling obscurities. Well, gentlemen, as the speaker before me accepted that, so I accept it. I am ready to admit, though the sight before me to-night makes me doubt it—that we may be few and obscure; but that is all the more reason for us to speak out what we believe. I believe there is not a man here this evening who won't join with me in endorsing the words of the great American poet of freedom—

They are slaves who will not choose
 Scorn and hatred and abuse,
 Rather than in silence shrink
 From the truth they needs must think ;
 They are slaves who will not be
 In the right with two or three.

My object to-night, then, will be to maintain before you that the cause of the South is not the cause of freedom, but that it is the cause of the most degrading and hateful slavery that has been before the world for thousands of years. I shall endeavour as much as possible to take with me your judgment and understanding. I do not want to excite your passions. I don't want to state anything which shall do that, and I ask you therefore to give me a patient and quiet hearing, because the facts that I shall have to put before you will take at least as much time as this meeting can possibly give to me.

I propose first to take a few of the leading Southern statesmen, to show you what they have done in times past, what have been their acts, and what their words, and then to ask you to say whether they are the sort of people who are in favor of freedom.

The first representative man of the Southern States is Mr. Jefferson Davis. Mr. Jefferson Davis is a planter—a Southern planter—who was educated at West Point. The first public act of his life, as far as I know, was that he raised a regiment and went to the Mexican war. The Mexican war I believe to have been as atrocious a war as has ever been waged in this world. However, be that as it may, he came back from that war; and what was the next public act of his life? You know very well that a great disgrace has fallen upon many of the States of America because they repudiated their public debts. Now, the next act of Mr. Jefferson Davis's life was this, that when there was a man—Mr. Walker—who came forward for the governorship of Mississippi upon the platform of making the State pay its debts, he was opposed by Mr. Jefferson Davis who advocated repudiation of the debt. No doubt in one sense Mr. Jefferson Davis was then the advocate of freedom—the freedom of not paying debts; but that is a freedom which I

don't think any Englishman will endorse. After the Mexican war the United States got a vast tract of new territory, and the question was, what was to be done with it? Then there arose a great struggle between the free-soil party and the slave party. The free-soil party said "slavery shall not be brought into these territories." The slave party said that any man should go where he liked with his slaves. Upon that question Mr. Jefferson Davis came out in 1850 in the debate upon what was called Bell's compromise—a compromise that was endeavoured to be made by legalizing a doctrine called "squatter's sovereignty," which I may explain to you if I have time. Upon that he said in the Senate:—"Never will I consent to any compromise which shall forbid slaves from being taken into the territories at the option of their owners." On the 23rd July, 1850, he moved—"That all laws existing in the said territory (California) which deny or obstruct the right of any citizen to remove or reside in such territory with any species of property legally held in any State of the Union, be and are hereby declared to be, null and void." He was then appointed Secretary at War to Mr. President Pierce, and as Secretary at War, and throwing the force of the Federal Government into the struggle in Kansas, he sent troops, turned out the free legislators, and had it not been for John Brown, and such men as he, slavery would have been established in Kansas by Mr. Jefferson Davis.* Then came the question of the re-opening of the slave trade; and, whatever may be said in England, I can prove to you that one of the things that is as clear as the sun at noonday is, that the Southern slaveholders, whatever they may say now, have been for years in favour of the re-opening of the African slave trade. Well, upon this occasion in 1859 to which I am alluding, Mr. Jefferson Davis, though he declined to vote in the State of Mississippi for the re-opening as far as that State was concerned, for fear lest Mississippi should be swamped by too much of a good thing, yet carefully guarded himself, and said, "I have no coincidence of opinion with those who prate of the inhumanity of the slave trade." In 1860, when secession was imminent, he moved in the Senate, by way of an amendment to the constitution of the United States:—

"That it shall be declared by amendment of the constitution that property in slaves, recognised as such by the local laws of any State,

* In 1855 Mr. Jefferson Davis advocated obtaining Cuba *at any price*, and in 1858 the protection of slavery throughout the territories. In short, he is *openly* pledged to every measure adverse to freedom for the last thirty years.

shall be on the same footing as any other species of property, and not subject to be divested or impaired by the local laws of any other State."

The meaning of that is, that the Southern slaveholder might take his slaves into New England, and that even there they should not be interfered with. Now, I have taken you shortly and rapidly through the career of this representative of the Southern States, and I say that there is not an act of his life which has not been opposed to the sacred cause of freedom.

Mr. A. H. Stephens, of Georgia, as you have been told, is the Vice-President of the Confederate States, a thoughtful man—one of the best of Southern slaveholders. Let us see what his opinions are. This is a portion of a speech of his in 1857 on the slave trade :—

"It is plain that unless the number of the African stock be increased we have not the population, and might as well abandon the race with our brethren of the North in the colonisation of the territories."

I give you the very words of the celebrated statement of Mr. Stevens which has only been referred to by the previous speakers. He says :—

"Our new Government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man, that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition. It is upon this, as I have stated, our social fabric is firmly planted; and I cannot permit myself to doubt the ultimate success of a full recognition of this principle throughout the civilised and enlightened world. This stone, which was rejected by the first builders, is become the chief stone of the corner in our new edifice. It is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes."

Now, I will add nothing to that but this, that every man who believes, as I do, that there is another corner-stone for the life of nations, must believe that that corner-stone has always been the great enemy of slavery—aye, and will fall upon it wherever it is found, in America or anywhere else, and crush it to atoms.

If my time were longer I would say a little about Messrs. Mason and Slidell and other Southern leaders, but they are not important enough to be brought forward before this meeting when time presses. I will therefore only tell you this, that Mr. Mason, who is over here in England, going about in society and preaching the cause of the South, was the author of the fugitive Slave Act. (Cries of "He is here.") I don't know whether he is in the room or not. (Cries of "Turn him out.") If he is, I would say, "Don't turn him out."

I have now a few words to say on the point, whether or not this Southern Confederacy, which we are told is the cause of freedom, is likely to reopen the African slave trade. I will give you a few facts which I gather from documents which are as open to any of you as they are to me. In 1857, the Governor of South Carolina, in his address to the Legislature, said, "Whatever our position, we must have cheap labour, which can be obtained but in one way—by the re-opening of the African slave-trade." Now I say this—and I don't believe that anybody can deny it, though I am not so certain of it as I am of the other facts, because I did not see the original draft of the Confederate constitution; but I tell you what I believe to be undoubted. It has been stated at any rate by many Americans who ought to know, that in the original draft of that constitution the reopening of the slave trade was provided for, and that it was taken out merely as a sop to England. I tell you why I believe so. Here is Mr. Spratt, of South Carolina—very well known in America, though perhaps many of you have not heard of him. As a member of the convention which took South Carolina out of the Union he said—"We all know that the constitution of the Confederate States is made for the day—just for the time being—a mere tub thrown out to the whale, to amuse and entertain the public mind for a time." That is the admission of the South Carolinian representative in a protest against the excision of the clause for reopening of the African trade. Then comes the Baltimore convention in 1858. At that convention the question of slavery was brought on, and Mr. Goodwin, of Georgia, said, "I am an African trade man," and then he goes on to say:—

"I want the gentlemen of this convention to visit my plantation, and I say again—if they come to see me—I will show them as fine a lot of negroes of the pure African blood as they will see anywhere. If it is right for us to go to Virginia and buy a negro, and pay \$2,000 for him, it is equally right to go to Africa and pay \$50."

I won't go through the speeches of the other gentlemen at that convention—a very important convention it was—but I will just read to you the resolutions which they passed. The first was "that slavery is right, and that being right, it could not be wrong to import slaves." The second was to the effect that it is expedient and proper that the African slave trade should be reopened, and that this convention will lend its influence to promote that end. Gentlemen, I won't detain you further, except to say that in 1859—the year before secession, at Vicksburg, in Mississippi—the States Convention passed a resolution for the reopening of the African slave trade by a large majority. One more fact. In the Arkansas State Legislature

in the same year the motion disapproving the reopening of the African slave trade was lost by a majority of twenty-one.*

One word more as to the state of things just before secession. Every man in America, especially the men concerned in politics, saw that a great split would come unless something could be done. Accordingly, Congress appointed committees of the Senate and Legislature to consider what could be done, by way of altering the constitution, so as to keep the Union together. These committees broke up hopelessly, and came to no conclusion. The majority sent in a resolution, and the minority sent in a resolution; but from the beginning to the end of their proceedings there was one thing, and one thing only, considered—slavery. And to show you the temper of the South at that time—which temper has not been improved since by the war—Mr. Adams, the present Minister to this country—the son and grandson of eminent men—a man as distinguished for his moderation as any man in the United States—Mr. Adams, being a member of the Committee of the House of Representatives, and anxious by any means he could to retain the Union, signed at first the resolution of the majority. Finding, however, that no concession would do for those men, he sent in a special report and protest alone, one part of which was:—

“That no form of adjustment will be satisfactory to the recusant States which does not incorporate into the constitution of the United States a recognition of the obligation to protect and extend slavery, and to that I will never consent.”

Once more, I have in my hand all the ordinances of the Secession States, but I won’t trouble you with them because my time is just up. But I will say this—that I have read those documents, and I tell you that not one, nor two, but all of them take up the ground, and that ground only, for seceding—that slavery was in danger and likely to be put down in the Southern States.

Now, what are the people? I have given you specimens of their leading men. I have given you specimens of the public acts of that Government which we are told to recognise as a Government in favour of freedom. I am sorry to say the people are quite worthy of the Government and of their leaders. What

* The opinion of a majority of Northern Americans as to the doings and intentions of the South in the matter of reopening the slave trade, may be gathered from clause 9 of the Chicago platform, (1860) which runs “That we brand *the recent reopening* of the African slave trade, under the cover of our national flag, aided by perversions of judicial power, as a crime against humanity, and a burning shame to our country and our age: and we call on Congress to take prompt and efficient measures for the total and final suppression of that execrable traffic.”

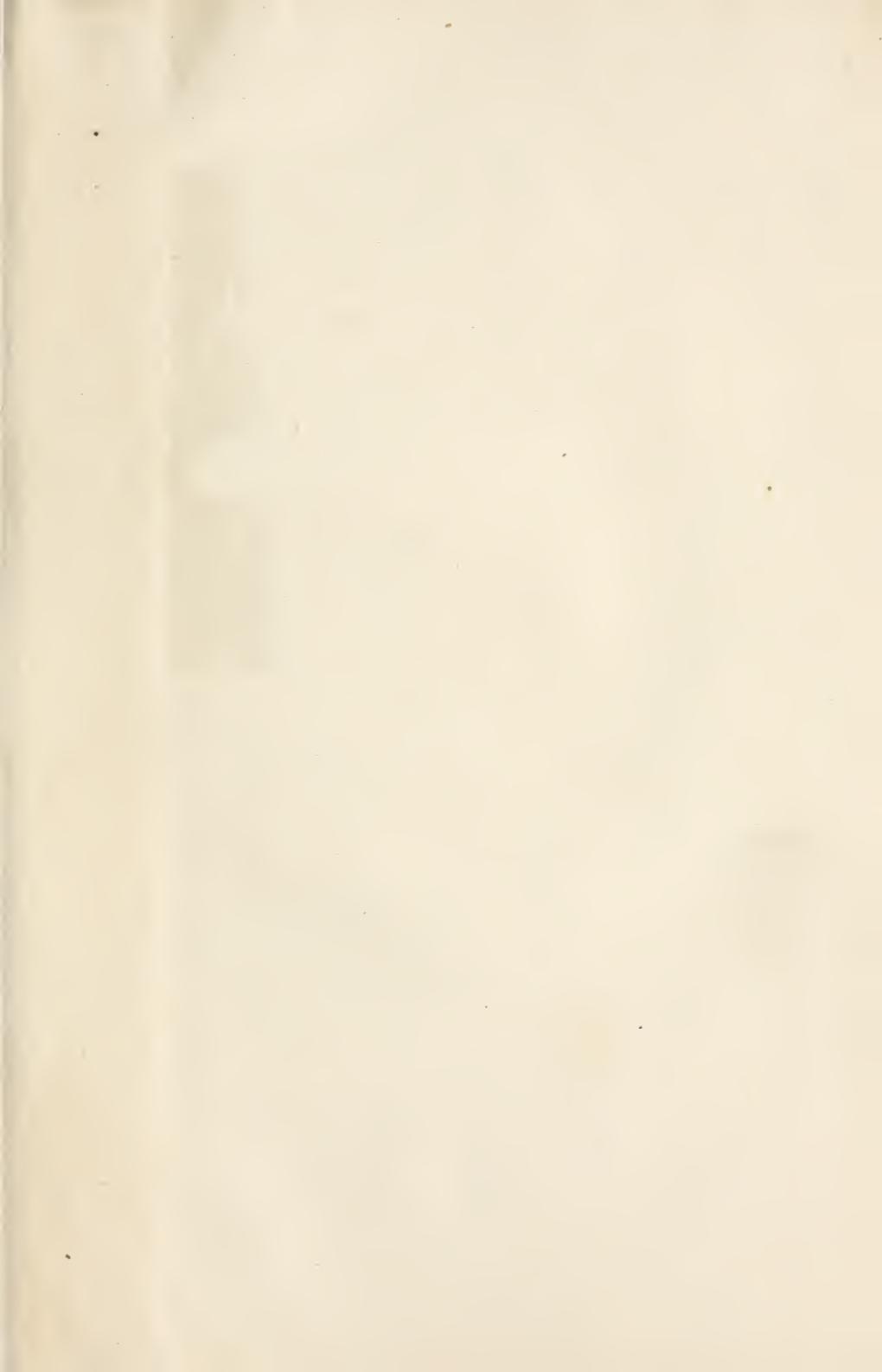
said their chief judge in that accursed judgment which he pronounced in the great slave case, known as the Dred Scott case? "That the African race are so much inferior to white men that they have no rights, and may justly be reduced to slavery for the white man's benefit." That is a decision of the chief judge of the highest court in the United States, a man who is at the head of the legal body there; and that principle seems to have been ground into the Southern portion of the American people. You have all read what has been written by the special correspondent of the *Times* newspaper on this question. What does Mr. Russell say about the Southern people? That in every city dogs are employed to catch runaway slaves. He and all other trustworthy witnesses describe both the people and the Government to be as deliberately hostile to freedom as any men that ever lived on the face of this earth. Of course in a meeting of this sort, and in twenty minutes, you cannot prove your case, but I only say this—I challenge any friend of the South to name one single leader there who is not pledged over and over again to slavery. I ask them to name one public act, one single Southern Confederate State, which is in favour of human freedom.

Well, I, an Englishman, find such a case as this. I, an Englishman, an inhabitant of a country of free thought, of free words, and of free men, am asked to endorse such a state of things. I am asked to endorse a people who do these acts, who have expressed these opinions, and to say that their cause is the cause of freedom. I say on the contrary, as I said when I first stood up before you, that the cause of the South is the most hateful, the most enslaving, the most debasing tyranny that has been on the face of the earth for a thousand years.

During this American contest one American has been abused, and I think more unjustly dealt by than any other man in the United States; and the cruel and unfair abuse of Americans by a portion of the press of this country accounts for the bitter feeling in America against England. In the same *Times* article from which I read to you just now, I find this statement:—"The stock humbug of the Northern people is a pretence of caring about slavery. Mr. Cassius Clay is much mistaken if he thinks that his neighbours could suppose that he is a real emancipator for emancipation's sake, or that he has any other object in view except that of deluding Europe with fine words." Such words as these are enough to make any people bitter; for a more unjust, a more cruel comment on a public man was never put forward. Now, Mr. Cassius Clay has said many foolish things about this country; but just let me say a word or two about his history. He was born in Kentucky—a slave state. When he went to New England to be educated, he looked about him to see what was going on there, and the difference between that country

and his own struck him, and made him think. He went back to his own state of Kentucky ; and what did he do there ? When he saw the state of things on one side of the Ohio—magnificent cultivation—but on the other side saw desolation and slavery, he said to himself, I will see if I cannot put an end to this, so far as I am concerned ; and he emancipated every slave he had. And what did he do then ? He went about Kentucky, the most dangerous state to act such a part in in all America, and with his life in his hand he lectured against slavery. He was attacked in his lecture room several times. At one time four men attacked him, and after a desperate fight he was left for dead on the floor. This man, who has emancipated every slave of his, who has been cut to pieces for the sake of emancipation, is the man about whom our great paper says :—“ Cassius Clay is much deceived in his own imagination if he thought his neighbours could imagine that he was a real emancipator for emancipation’s sake.” I have done. I will only put the case to you as it has been put by the great anti-slavery poet, Mr. Lowell, in his poem called “ Jonathan to John ; or an address to England :”—

We know we've got a cause, John,
 That's honest, right, and true ;
 We thought 'twould win applause, John,
 If nowhere else, from you.
 The South cry poor men down, John,
 And all men up cry we,
 Black, yellow, white, and brown, John,
 Now which is your idee ?





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